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9 March 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Photo Reconnaissance Capabilities in the North Vietnam/
China Border Area

1. Two factors must be considered regarding photographic reconnaissance in the North Vietnam/China border area. Weather is a very important limiting factor since heavy cloud cover during much of the year precludes good quality photography from high level reconnaissance. An equally important factor is that no aircraft can overfly China without 40 Committee approval.

2. To acquire coverage inside China it is necessary to overfly China at some point, even if the aircraft is flying a course parallel to but south of the border. This is especially true with the SR-71 because of its high speed and wide turning radius. There is little possibility that the SR-71 will be allowed to fly over Communist China. An alternate means of obtaining the desired photo coverage is the use of the U-2 R for overflights of China. This, of course, also requires 40 Committee approval.

3. The SR-71's are currently authorized by the 40 Committee to fly ten missions per month over northern North Vietnam, but seldom is this number flown due to the adverse weather conditions in that area. On 1 March an SR-71 flew this northern orbit and on 7 March an SR-71 flew a mission over northern Laos. No SR-71 flights are scheduled in the northern area for the next 24 hours.

4. Other alternate means of photographic coverage in this area are via satellite -- no KH-4 satellite coverage will be possible until after 24 March -- and drone. The normal drones in use in this area only give spotting coverage and have been primarily utilized south of

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22°. Two Tagboard, long range high speed drones, missions have been flown over China [REDACTED] These assets can be tasked on short notice and 17 of them are available. Based on their performance to date, however, this does not appear to be a practical approach to the problem.

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[REDACTED]
Vietnamese Affairs Staff

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